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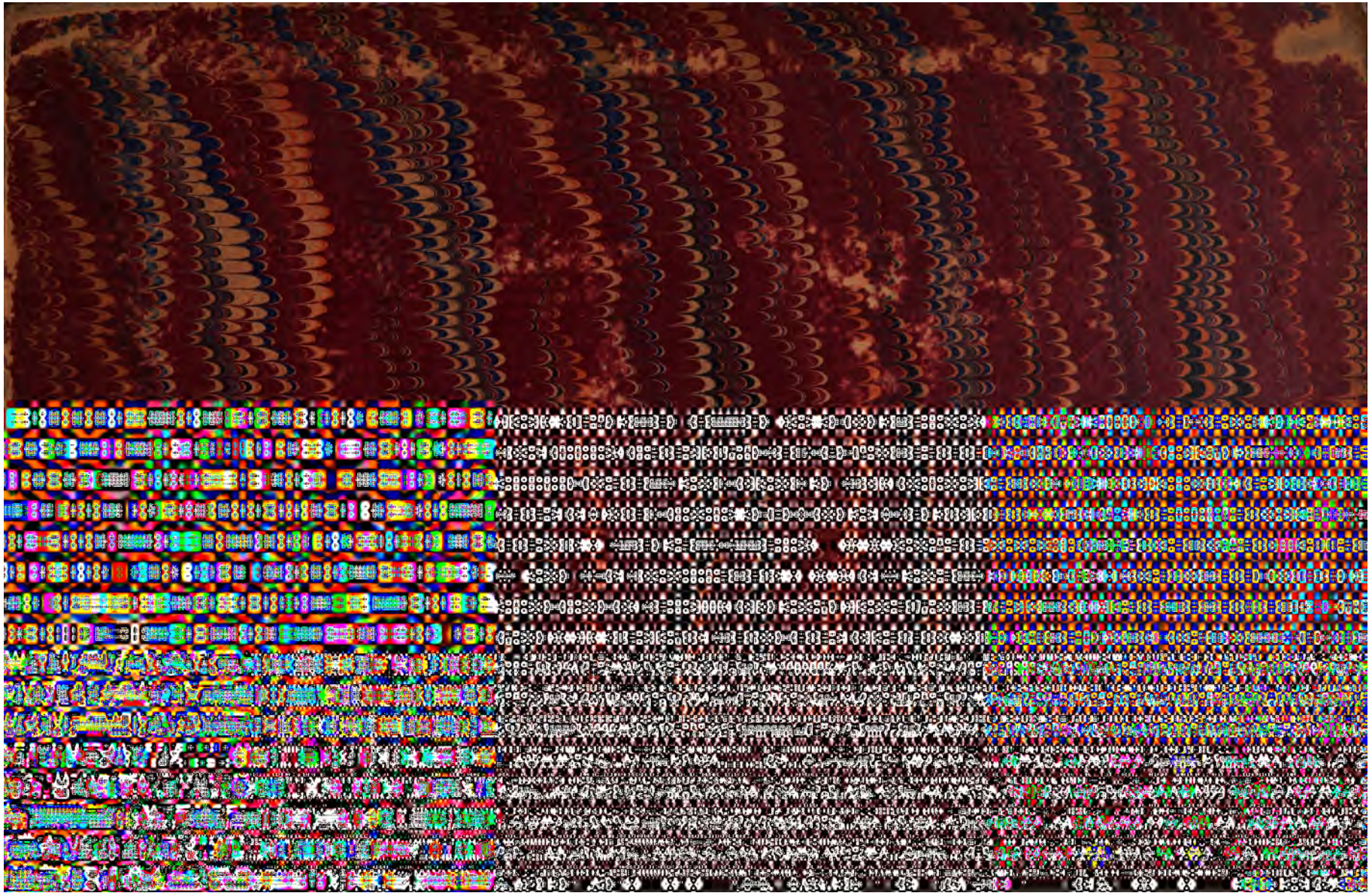

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TWO BRIEF PAPERS.

By JUSTIN WINSOR.

1886.

TWO BRIEF PAPERS:

BEING

THE ABANDONED BOSTON;

THE EXTENT OF THE CONTINENTAL LINE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY MISCONCEIVED.

By JUSTIN WINSOR.

[Privately Reprinted, Seventy-five Copies, from the Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, January, 1886.]

C.
CAMBRIDGE:
JOHN WILSON AND SON.
University Press.
1886.

~~13453.3~~
US13174.26

1886. Feb. 16,

Gift of the Author

TWO BRIEF PAPERS.

THE ABANDONED BOSTON.

PROFESSOR HORSFORD, of Cambridge, in the pursuit of some studies in the early cartography of the New England coast, has been induced to believe that a trading-post and fort of the French in the early part of the sixteenth century was situated upon Charles River. Estimating the distance up the stream according to some of the early descriptions, he sought a spot at the confluence of Stony Brook with Charles River in the town of Weston, and found there a ditch and embankment, which apparently has escaped the attention of all the local antiquaries of Watertown, Waltham, Weston, and Newton, since an examination of all their publications reveals no reference to them. This ditch, which is not far from sixteen hundred feet in length, runs parallel in the main to the water line of the river and brook, within the angle caused by their confluence, and follows the contour line of fifty-one feet above tide-water for most of its course; but towards the southerly end it descends somewhat, and is lost in an expansion upon a point jutting into Charles River. About midway it bends into a loop, which nearly fills the apex of the angle. Across the base of this loop is another excavation of a like kind, which seems to have completed the circuit of the knoll lying within the loop, though a cartway across this supplemental ditch has obliterated it at one place. A survey which Professor Horsford has caused to be made reveals so constant a level of the excavation as to preclude a belief in its being the result of natural causes, and its construction and direction seem to determine

that it could not have been an ancient sluiceway, though some walling of stone at the upper end might indicate an intention of converting a portion of it to such purposes at a later day. The spot is now covered with a young growth of wood; but there are signs that a growth of large trees has been twice cut from it, some of which stood in the ditch. The levelness of the ditch would have adapted it to holding still water, as a part of a defensive work; but the excavation is too narrow for such purpose, and the earth is thrown towards the enemy (a river). It is, however, just such a ditch as would be dug in which to plant a stockade, returning the earth about the base. The fact that the embankment is continued three hundred feet both north and south from the enclosed portion, in a way to afford no protection against attack, seems to indicate that the whole work is but a segment of a line of circumvallation which was left unfinished, the stockade not being planted in the portions already excavated.

I refrain from outlining Professor Horsford's arguments and proofs of his belief, as that gentleman has already done so in a letter addressed to Judge Daly, which is printed in the Journal of the American Geographical Society. Researches of my own lead me rather to the opinion that these relics may possibly mark the site of an early attempt to found the town of Boston. Thomas Dudley tells us[1] that Winthrop's company had intended to give this name to the place "they first resolved on." We know from the same source that a few days after the arrival of Winthrop at Salem, he set out, on the 17th of June, 1630, for Charlestown at the "Bay," whence by means of parties the neighboring rivers were explored to find a convenient spot to found their town, and that they discovered such a place as "liked" or suited them, "three leagues up Charles River." This decision as to a spot was formed not long after June 17–20; and from that time till after they had reached Charlestown on the way thither by water from Salem, they kept this purpose. We have a distinct expression of this intention in the letter of Samuel Fuller of June 28, to be referred to again. At a later date, learning by recent arrivals of the intention of the French to attack them, and finding their company so weakened by sickness that they

[1] Letter (March 12–28, 1631) to the Countess of Lincoln in Young's Chronicles of Massachusetts, p. 313.

were "unable to carry their ordnance and baggage so far" as the three leagues up the Charles, they changed their mind, notwithstanding they had already transshipped their goods for the carriage. This "change of counsel," as Dudley calls it, cannot be definitely dated; but Dr. Young places it under August.[1] During, then, an interval of some extent, probably of weeks, when their original purpose held, it seems reasonable to suppose that they would have sent a fatigue party to prepare the ground and make ready a fort — as Dudley tells us they intended to have one — to receive their ordnance. When the news of the French led them to take more hasty measures, and the debilitated condition of the colonists rendered it undesirable to go farther, they scattered "dispersedly," as Dudley says, about the mouth of the river; and though some months passed before a determination on a site for their town was reached, their fatigue party would naturally have been recalled, after a change of their original purpose, leaving their work incomplete. It is not impossible that these works at Stony Brook may be found to be this premature and abandoned Boston. It will be borne in mind that just such an extensive circumvallation as may have been here intended, was some months later established at Cambridge.

Prince[2] is the first historian to try to determine the site of this preliminary choice, from Dudley's narrative; and he identifies it with Watertown. Dr. Young,[3] in commenting on Dudley's letter, prefers Cambridge. Both were influenced, doubtless, by the fact that any position above the falls at Watertown would have placed them away from tide-water, and the approach of vessels or boats.[4] But the fact of their seeking to find a spot "up the river" indicates a purpose of leaving tide-water, and the falls at Watertown would have

[1] Prince (Boston, 1826, p. 309), by his collation of the excerpts from the early writers, places this inability to carry up their ordnance, etc., some time in July; and under August 1st, he says of Charlestown, "the greater number at this time intending no other than to settle here." Johnson, in his "Wonder-working Providence," though he speaks of "12 of July or thereabout, 1630," as the day of their first setting foot "on this western end of the world," evidently from the context places at that time their reaching Charlestown. (Poole's ed. p. 37.)

[2] Annals, p. 308.

[3] Chronicles of Massachusetts, p. 312.

[4] Dr. Fuller, in a letter written from Charlestown during the interval referred to (June 28), says: "The gentlemen here lately come over are resolved to sit down *at the head of Charles River*." Mass. Hist. Coll. vol. iii. p. 74.

prevented any naval attack, to which they might have been liable both from the French and Dutch, for each claimed the region within which the English were. Further, Dudley's reference to their inability "to carry their ordnance and baggage" would hardly apply to water carriage only, after these belongings had already been "unshipped" into "other vessels," presumably of lighter draught.

It may not be supposed that Dudley's "three leagues" was more than an estimate; and a distance of that length "up the Charles" is not easy to determine when we find the early authorities varying in their practice of designating the mouth of that river, some placing it at Nantasket, others at Long Island Head, others at Copps Hill, and others at the outlet into the Back Bay. In commenting upon Dudley, Dr. Palfrey,[1] evidently not disturbed by the falls at Watertown, and probably measuring from the Back Bay, says that the spot must have been somewhere in Waltham or Weston, and "most likely near the mouth of Stony Brook," hitting precisely the spot of Professor Horsford's discovery, and apparently without knowing that any such remains existed there.

There was a map of this locality made in 1640, which Dr. Francis says[2] was preserved till 1825, when it was burned in the Court Street fire, and I suppose in the office of James Savage, along with one of the volumes of Winthrop's manuscript Journal. Should a copy of that map exist, it might be found to yield some information on the point before us. Winthrop himself makes no mention of this preliminary work, and by reason of a gap gave his editor no occasion to extract from the map any information if it existed. The recently identified Winthrop map (1634) seems to show Stony Brook and its junction with the Charles; but there is no legend at that point.

If the conclusion which I have ventured to suggest is ever established by indubitable evidence, these remains at Stony Brook, for whose discovery we are indebted to Professor Horsford, would certainly be the most interesting reminder which exists, of the toil and anxieties of that first year of the original Bostonians.

[1] New England, vol. i. p. 324. [2] Sketches of Watertown, p. 11.

THE EXTENT OF THE CONTINENTAL LINE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY MISCONCEIVED.

A RECENT popular History of the United States gives figures which are very familiar to all who have studied our revolutionary history in the printed publications of the last fifty years, to the effect that during the eight years of the war the thirteen Colonies and States furnished to the Continental line 231,959 men, as an aggregate of those furnished by the several States as follows: —

New Hampshire	12,496
Massachusetts	67,907
Rhode Island	5,908
Connecticut	32,039
New York	17,781
New Jersey	10,727
Pennsylvania	25,608
Delaware	2,387
Maryland	13,832
Virginia	26,672
North Carolina	7,263
South Carolina	6,660
Georgia	2,679
In all	231,959

The figures, according to different tabulations, vary a little from these just given, but not much. The error in considering these numbers to represent troops furnished to the Continental line seems likely to be perpetuated at second hand in our popular histories; and it may be worth while to show the origin of the misconception, and what attempts have been made to correct it, seemingly without avail.

In 1790 General Knox, then Secretary of War, presented to President Washington a "Report on the Troops furnished by the several States during the War of the Revolution," — a title which might lead one to expect to find just such a table as has been referred to; but there is none such in it. What he does give is a series of tables showing the number of Continentals and militia credited to the several States during the nine calendar years covered by the war, and making no distinction between services rendered by each soldier, whether for a part or for the whole of a year or for several years. General Knox did not attempt to tabulate his several annual statements into one including the whole war, because no common basis could be formed from his data, either of individual men enlisted, or of length of service rendered by each. I cannot find that Knox's report was printed at the time; at least, there is no record of such printing in Ben: Perley Poore's recently published "Descriptive Catalogue of the Publications of the United States."

The first attempt to use Knox's figures historically was when a summary of them was printed in 1824, in the first volume of the Collections (p. 236) of the New Hampshire Historical Society; and here the error began. The editor of that publication did what Knox had refrained from doing, and summed up his annual figures, and gave the total of 231,959 as representing the whole number of troops furnished by the States to the Continental army. The table was printed similarly in the "American Almanac" (1830, p. 187, and 1831, p. 112), and in "Niles' Register" (July 31, 1830), and soon passed into current belief. When the Government in 1832 printed Vol. I. p. 14 of "Military Affairs," in the series of "The American State Papers," the editor of it inserted Knox's report entire, so that it became accessible to all. The unwarranted tabulation which had been given in the works referred to did not attract attention till Lorenzo Sabine, in the first edition of his "American Loyalists" in 1847 (p. 31), going, as he says, to the report as then printed, made a new tabulation, which, as regards the Continentals, was to the same effect, and continued the misconception; and we find it still further perpetuated in Lossing's "Field Book of the Revolution" (vol. ii. p. 837), Hildreth's "United States" (vol. iii. p. 441), Barry's "Massachusetts" (vol. ii. p. 304), not to name other less known

books; and Palfrey cites it in his review of Mahon, which passed under Sparks's eye. The deductions which Sabine had drawn from this misconceived table, particularly as regards the share of South Carolina in the struggle, brought some attacks on him, and led to his closer examination of the original report. In his second edition of 1864 (vol. i. p. 43), he recast his tables, but was curiously unsuccessful in enlightening his readers; for in one line he repeats the statement that the figures represent troops furnished by the States for the war, and in the very next he explains that these same figures mean enlistments, not men. Thus he would have it understood that if a soldier enlisted for one year, and then re-enlisted for three years, he would count two in the aggregate; whereas the fact is he counts four, one for each year when he was reported as on the rolls.

Notwithstanding this clew to a right rendering of the figures had been so recently given, George W. Greene, in his "Historical View of the American Revolution" (p. 455), published the next year (1865), still adheres to the old view. Ten years later, when General Carrington published his "Battles of the American Revolution" (p. 653), he seems to have had a suspicion that the figures, as usually given, were wrongly interpreted, and says that the table ordinarily given must be taken as representing years' service, and not individual recruits, and explains what he means by saying that a man enlisted into the Continental line April 19, 1775 (when, by the way, no Continental line existed, as Congress did not adopt the provincial army around Boston till after the battle of Bunker Hill), who continued to the 19th of April, 1783, when the hostilities formally ceased, would be counted eight in the aggregate. Still General Carrington, in giving the old table, makes no allowance that the 27,443 given as the number of men in 1775, would count only for half that number in years' service, since their service could only be for the latter half of that year; nor does he regard, in his estimate of years' service, the various terms of less than a year which General Knox reports, or the operations of casualties in abridging terms of service, or the diminished service of recruits for any one year who enlisted after the beginning of that year.

The truth of the matter, then, is that the figures of the usual table are worthless as representing the number of men which made up the Continental line, and also as representing

the actual service by years, to which the different States are entitled, and have only a value as enabling us approximately to judge how much more or less, relatively, one State contributed year by year than another to the military force that gained our independence. So far as I know there is yet to be the first statement in print which shall explain accurately the figures which Knox reported to the President in 1790.

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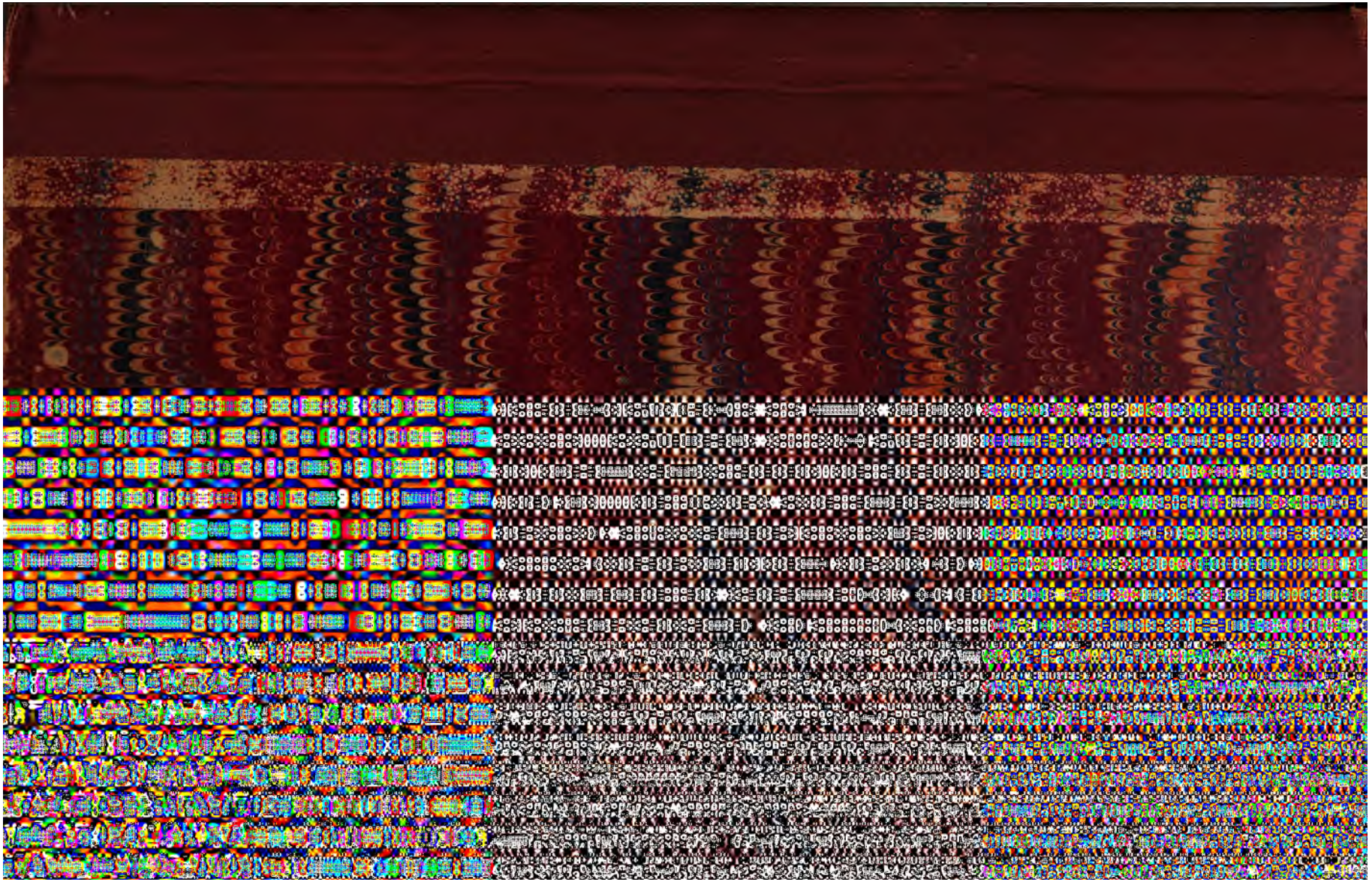
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